DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 293 064 CG 020 712

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TITLE Attributions of Responsibility to Male and Female Victims of Rape and Robbery.
PUB DATE 9 May 86
NOTE 17p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (58th, Chicago, IL, May 8-10, 1986).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Attribution Theory; Crime; *Criminals; Higher Education; *Rape; *Responsibility; *Sex Differences; Undergraduate Students; *Victims of Crime
IDENTIFIERS *Aggravated Robbery

ABSTRACT

This study examined the effects of victim gender and type of crime on college students' attributions of responsibility to the victim for the crime. Male (N=48) and female (N=48) undergraduates responded to one of four experimental vignettes depicting either a rape or a robbery committed by a male stranger against either a male or female victim. After reading the vignettes, students made judgments concerning the victim, the crime, and the assailant. Results indicated that, compared to males, female victims of rape and robbery were perceived as more likely to have encouraged their assault and were attributed more responsibility for their victimization. Robbery victims were seen as more likely to have encouraged the crime than were rape victims, but were not attributed greater responsibility for victimization. Rape was judged to be a more serious and traumatic crime for the victim than was robbery. Students held more negative personal feelings toward, and assigned longer sentences to, rapists than robbers. Male and female students differed in their perceptions of rape and robbery, and of assailants. Females viewed both crimes as more serious, were more certain of the assailant's guilt, and attributed greater responsibility to the assailant than did males. Results suggest that victim gender and type of crime may influence the degree to which victims are held responsible for their victimization. (Author/NB)

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Attributions of Responsibility to Male and Female Victims of Rape and Robbery

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, IL, May 9, 1986. Copies of this paper may be obtained by writing to Elizabeth Rice Allgeier, Ph.D., Psychology Dept., Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH 43403

Running Head: MALE AND FEMALE VICTIMS

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Abstract

The present study was conducted to examine the effects of victim gender and type of crime on college students' attributions of responsibility to the victim for the crime. Specifically, this study addressed the question of whether "blaming the victim" by observers occurs with male rape victims and victims of aggravated robbery as it has been found to occur with female victims of rape (Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; Krulewitz, 1981; Luginbuhl & Mullin, 1981). Ninety-six undergraduate college students (48 males and 48 females) resonded to one of four experimental vignetttes. The vignettes depicted either a rape or a robbery committed by a male stranger against either a male or female victim. After reading the vignettes, students were asked to make several judgments concerning the victim, the crime committed, and the male assailant. Results indicated that female victims of rape and robbery were perceived as more likely to have encouraged their assault and were attributed more responsibility for their victimization, compared to male victims of these crimes. Male and female robbery victims were seen as more likely to have encouraged the crime than male and female rape victims, but were not attributed greater responsibility for their victimization. For both male and female students, rape was judged to be a more serious and traumatic crime for the victim than robbery. Students also held more negative personal feelings toward, and assigned longer sentences to, rapists than robbers. The findings indicated that male and female students differed in their perceptions of rape and robbery, and the men who commit these crimes. Female students viewed both crimes as more serious, were more certain of the assailant's guilt, and attributed greater responsibility to the assailant than did male students. Results indicated that the gender of the victim and the type of crime committed by the assailant may influence the degree to which victims are held responsible for their victimization.

Attribution of Responsibility to Male and Female
Victims of Rape and Robbery

A large amount of evidence exists in the psychological literature indicating that women who are raped are often held responsible for their victimization. The tendency of observers to "blame the victim" has been empirically addressed by many researchers and the degree to which the female rape victim is held responsible for the crime committed against her has been shown to be influenced by a number of variables (Deitz, Littman, & Bentley, 1984; Feldman-Summers & Linder, 1976; Krulewitz & Nash, 1979; Scroggs, 1976). One characteristic of rape victims that has not been addressed in relation to responsibility attributions made by observers is the gender of the victim.

Only very recently has the rape of men by other men outside of prison been recognized as a social problem. Some states have begun to modify their sexual assault statutes to include men as potential victims and to define sexual acts other than penile-vaginal intercourse as rape. Legal and social definitions of sexual assault often differ, however, and little is known about male rape victims, the prevalence of male rape, or how male rape victims are viewed by society. What little research that does exist on noninstitutional male rape primarily consists of a few small clinically-based studies (Forman, 1982; Goyer & Eddleman, 1984; Groth & Burgess, 1980; Kaufman, Divasto, Jackson, Voorhees, & Christy, 1980). Because of the small amount of research on male rape victims, this study was conducted in part to explore observer responses to depictions of male rape. Specifically, we wished to address the question of whether the phenomenon of "blaming the victim" by observers occurs in attributions made about male rape victims as well as female victims.

Because we were interested in whether the tendency to "blame the victim" extends to crimes other than rape, attributions of responsibility to victims of aggravated robbery (i.e., mugging) were also investigated in this study. Aggravated robbery was chosen for comparison to rape because both crimes involve a sense of loss to the victim, physically or monetarily. Both crimes also have the same legal ramifications in the state in which this research was conducted. The Ohio Revised Code provides identical sentence lengths to be given to first offenders convicted of rape and aggravated robbery. Despite these similarities, rape and robbery differ due to the sexual nature of rape. Krulewitz (1981) found that female victims were seen by college students as more likely than male victims to be raped in the course of being physically assaulted by a male. There is some evidence that both the victim and the assailant are viewed in a different context depending on the nature of the crime committed (Barnett & Feild, 1978;

Sealy & Wain, 1980). Rape victims are generally treated with more suspicion from the authorities than are victims of robbery (Curtis, 1974). Although Curtis (1974) found victim provocation to have occurred in fewer cases of reported rape than robbery, only for rape must the victim prove lack of consent in a court of law (Feild & Bienen, 1980).

Male and female students have previously been found to differ in their perceptions of crimes and the persons involved. For example, presented with a depiction of rape, college women tend to assign less responsibility to the victim and more responsibility to the assailant than do college men (Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; Krulewitz & Nash, 1979; Krulewitz & Payne, 1978; Rumsey & Rumsey, 1977; Selby, Calhoun, & Brock, 1977; Smith, Keating, Hester, & Mitchell, 1976). These findings are often interpreted as due to the female observers' identification with the victim and the male observers' relative lack of victim identification. However, attribution studies of this sort have portrayed only females as rape victims.

In summary, this research involved an experimental investigation of the effects of victim gender, type of crime (rape or robbery), and observer gender on attributions of responsibility to victims for the crime. Specifically, we were interested in the degree to which "blaming the victim" is a function of the gender of the victim versus the type of crime committed. That is, we wished to examine whether female rape victims are blamed for their victimization because they were raped or because they are female. The effects of victim gender, type of crime, and observer gender on judgments made about the assailant and the crimes committed were also examined.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were ninety-six undergraduate introductory psychology students (48 males and 48 females) at Bowling Green State University. Participation was voluntary and anonymous and all subjects were given informed consent sheets before completing the materials. Subjects received credit toward their course grade for participating in this study. Analysis of the demographic information obtained from subjects indicated that members of the sample were predominantly single, white, freshman college students. The mean age of subjects was 19.14 years, with a range of 18 to 30 years. The majority of subjects described themselves as Republican in political orientation and Protestant or Catholic in religious affiliation. Subjects were asked about their experiences with the crime depicted in their experimental condition. Twenty-one percent of the male subjects and 19% of the female subjects in the robbery

condition reported having been victims of robbery, and 6% of the males and 6% of the females in the rape condition reported having been victims of rape.

Materials

A demographic and personal experiences questionnaire was administered to obtain information concerning subjects' background and their personal experiences with either rape or robbery. The experimental vignettes were modeled after the rape vignette used by Barnett & Feild (1978). Four vignettes were created by manipulation of the gender of the victim and whether the assailant raped or mugged the victim. All other information presented in the vignettes was held constant across the four conditions. The vignettes were a newpaper-type account that depicted either a male or female, who while walking home from work at night, was approached by a male stranger and subsequently robbed or raped by the assailant in a nearby alley. The victims were described as having immediately notified the authorities. The assailant was reported to have been apprehended by the police and a positive identification was made by the victim.

A post-vignette questionnaire was used to obtain subjects' attributions of responsibility and other judgments made about the victim, the assailant, and the crime depicted. Dependent measures obtained from subjects with regard to the victim included amount of responsibility attributed to the victim for the incident, the likelihood that the victim encouraged the crime (i.e., victim precipitation), identification with the victim, and personal feelings toward the victim. Measures obtained from subjects in response to the assailant were the amount of responsibility attributed to the assailant for the incident, certainty of the assailant's guilt, identification with the assailant, and personal feelings toward the assailant. Measures pertaining to the crime committed included the sentence length assigned to the offender (from 5 to 25 years in accordance with the Ohio Revised Code), judged seriousness of the crime, degree of trauma for the victim as a result of the crime, and the probability that the victim was selected by chance. All of the dependent variables were measured on 7-point scales, with higher scores indicating greater levels of each measure.

Subjects in the female rape condition also completed the 25-item Attitudes Toward Rape (ATR) scale (Barnett & Feild, 1977; Feild, 1978; Feild & Bienen, 1980). A modification of the ATR for male victims was given to subjects in the male rape condition. Items on the ATR adapted for male victims were identical to the original items, with the exception of reference to the gender of the victim. Items on both versions of the ATR were measured on 6-point scales with larger scores indictating more anti-rape and pro-victim attitudes. Thornton, Robbins, &

Johnson (1981) factor analyzed the ATR item scores from a sample of college students and found four constructs underlying the scale. These factors were labeled: 1)Victim Precipitation-Responsibility (the degree to which rape victims are held responsible for their victimization), 2) Negative Evaluation (the degree to which rape victims are negatively evaluated), 3) Sexual Motivation (the degree to which rape is viewed as motivated by sex), and 4) Power Motivation (the degree to which rape is viewed as motivated by power). The mean scores for each factor were used to compare male and female subjects' general attitudes toward male and female rape victims and the males who rape them.

For future research purposes, a post-experimental questionnaire was also completed by subjects. An open-ended question was used to examine subjects' rationale for assigning sentence length to the assailant. Subjects were also asked to list any additional information they would have liked to have known about the victim, assailant, and the crime depicted in the vignettes when making their judgments.

Procedure

Subjects were recruited via the experimental sign-up procedure for undergraduate psychology students at BGSU. Small groups of 10 to 20 students were met by a male and a female experimenter at predesignated times. Participating males and females were randomly assigned to one of the experimental conditions. Upon entering the room in which the experiment was conducted, all subjects received informed consent sheets. Subjects were instructed to read the consent form which detailed the nature of the study and to sign and return the form to the experimenters if they chose to participate. Upon turning in their consent forms, subjects received a large envelope containing written instructions and the experimental materials. Materials contained in the envelope included (in their order of presentation): the demographic and personal experiences questionnaire, an experimental vignette, the response questionnaire (i.e., the dependent measures), and the post-experimental questionnaire. The ATR scale for male or female victims was also included in the rape conditions (consistent with the gender of the victim portrayed in the vignette). The ATR scale and the experimental vignettes were counterbalanced in order of presentation to preclude any order effects. Subjects were instructed to complete the materials in their order of presentation and to return all completed materials to their envelope. Upon returning the experimental materials to the experimenters, all subjects received written debriefing and credit forms in return for their participation.

Results

Data analysis consisted of 2 (gender of the victim) X 2 (type of crime) X 2 (gender of the subject) multivariate analyses of variance performed on the dependent variables measuring subjects' attributions made about the victim, crime, and assailant depicted in the experimental vignettes. All tests of interactions between the independent variables in all analyses were found to be nonsignificant, and therefore only the main effects of the variables will be addressed below.

Effects of Victim Gender

Victim Variables. Analysis of variance showed significant effects of gender of the victim on subjects' judgments of the likelihood that the victim encouraged the crime ($F=5.84$, $p=.018$) and the amount of responsibility attributed to the victim ($F=5.57$, $p=.02$). Thus, female victims of rape and robbery judged as more likely to have done something to encourage the crime committed against them and were attributed greater responsibility for their victimization than were male victims of these crimes. Gender of the victim did not significantly affect the degree to which subjects identified with the victim or their personal feelings toward the victim.

Crime Variables. Victim gender did not have a significant effect on subjects' perceptions of the crime committed by the assailant. Gender of the victim did not affect subjects' judgments of the sentence length assigned to the assailant, the likelihood that the victim was selected by chance, the degree of victim trauma, or the seriousness of the crimes.

Assailant Variables. Gender of the victim also did not have a significant effect on subjects' perceptions of the male assailant. Victim gender had no effect on the degree to which subjects' identified with the assailant, their personal feelings toward him, their certainty of his guilt, or the amount of responsibility for the crime attributed to him. Table 1 shows the mean comparisons of the dependent variables for male and female victims.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Effects of Type of Crime

Victim Variables. Type of crime was found to have a significant effect on subjects' judgments of the likelihood that the victim encouraged the crime ($F=13.95$, $p<.001$). Male and female victims of robbery were seen as more likely to have encouraged the crime committed against them than were rape victims. The type of crime did not significantly influence the amount of responsibility subjects attributed to the victim, their identification with the victim, or

their personal feelings toward the victim.

Crime Variables. The type of crime committed by the assailant was found to influence the sentence length subjects assigned to the assailant ($F=25.05$, $p<.001$), with longer prison sentences given to rapists than to robbers. The average sentence length assigned by subjects in the robbery condition was 5-7 years, whereas the average sentence length assigned in the rape condition was 11-13 years. The type of crime also had a significant effect on the degree of perceived victim trauma ($F=42.47$, $p<.001$) and judged seriousness of the crime ($F=40.69$, $p<.001$). Thus, rape was viewed by subjects as a more serious crime than robbery, and one that caused more trauma to the victim. The type of crime committed by the assailant did not influence subjects' ratings of the likelihood that the victim was selected by chance.

Assailant Variables. The type of crime had a significant effect on subjects' personal feelings toward the assailant ($F=5.78$, $p=.02$), with subjects holding more negative feelings toward male rapists than male robbers. Type of crime had no effect on the amount of responsibility subjects attributed to the assailant, their identification with the assailant, or their certainty of the assailant's guilt. Table 2 lists the mean comparisons of the dependent measures for the rape and robbery conditions.

Insert Table 2 About Here

Effects of Subject Gender

Victim Variables. The analysis of variance for the effects of subject gender on perceived likelihood of victim encouragement approached significance ($F=3.35$, $p=.07$), with male subjects indicating somewhat more likelihood of victim encouragement than female subjects. In general, however, the gender of the subject did not significantly influence the perceived likelihood of victim encouragement, the amount of responsibility attributed to the victim for the crime, the subjects' identification with the victim, or their personal feelings toward the victim.

Crime Variables. Gender of the subject was found to have a significant effect on the perceived seriousness of the crime committed ($F=2.49$, $p=.05$). Females judged both rape and robbery to be more serious crimes than did males. Subject gender did not affect the sentence length assigned to the assailant, judgments of the likelihood that the victim was selected by chance, or perceived victim trauma.

Assailant Variables. Significant effects of subject gender were found for subjects' ratings of their certainty of the assailant's guilt ($F=9.97$, $p=.002$) and the amount of responsibility

attributed to the assailant ($F=8.53$, $p=.004$). Females, compared to males, tended to be more certain of the assailant's guilt and attributed more responsibility for the crime to the assailant. Gender of the subject did not influence identification with the assailant or personal feelings toward the assailant. Table 3 lists the mean comparisons of the dependent measures for male and female subjects.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Attitudes Toward Rape. There were no significant differences in male and female students' attitudes toward rape involving female victims and male assailants. Comparison of subjects' pre- and post-vignette ATR scores for male and female victims indicated a significant difference in only one experimental condition. Compared to male subjects who completed the ATR before reading the male rape vignette , male subjects who completed the ATR after reading the male rape vignette were found to have higher scores on the ATR, indicating more anti-rape, pro-victim attitudes toward male rape victims. This difference occurred for two ATR factors: Victim Precipitation-Responsibility ($t=2.27$, $p<.05$) and Sexual Motivation ($t=2.47$, $p<.05$). Males who read a vignette depicting a male being raped by another male before completing the ATR scale indicated less victim precipitation- responsibility attitudes (pre-vignette=4.51, post-vignette=5.31) and less sexual motivation attitudes for male rape (pre-vignette=2.19, post-vignette=3.57) than did male subjects who completed the ATR before reading the vignette.

Comparing pre-vignette ATR scores for male victims only, male subjects viewed male rape as being more sexually motivated than females subjects (males=2.19, females=4.10; $t=3.84$, $p<.004$). The apparent gender differences in attitudes concerning the sexual motivation of male rape and pre-and post-vignette differences for male subjects in the male rape condition are quite speculative, in part due to the small sample size. Also, the modification of the ATR used may not be representative of attitudes toward male rape victims, if rape attitudes concerning male rape victims have different underlying dimensions than attitudes toward female rape victims. The lack of effect of subject gender on subjects' overall attitudes concerning victim precipitation-responsibility in cases of rape correspond with the lack of an effect of subject gender on the measures of victim encouragement and victim responsibility with regard to the experimental vignettes.

Discussion

The results from this study suggest that although the victimization of males and females are viewed as equally serious by college students, female victims are viewed as having encouraged the crime committed against them to a greater degree and are held more responsible for their victimization than are male victims. Although the implications of these findings are quite speculative at this point in time, it appears that female victims of rape may be further victimized by society's tendency to blame them for their misfortune not just because they were raped but because they are female.

Because women are often encouraged by society to restrict their behavior in order to prevent being raped (Krulewitz & Kahn, 1983; Riger & Gordon, 1979), these results may reflect students' beliefs that females put themselves at greater risk of rape than do males by walking alone at night in an urban area. Therefore, a female may be be held more accountable than a male for her victimization due to her failure to act according to social standards of gender-appropriate behavior. Indeed, female victims of rape have previously been shown to be held more responsible for their victimization if they are portrayed as having acted in a socially inappropriate, or careless, manner (Acock & Ireland, 1983; Damrosch, 1985). Further research on attributions of responsibiltiy made by observers to male and female victims should take into account potential differences in individual beliefs in gender-appropriate social behaviors for males and females and the possible effects of these differences on attributions.

Not surprisingly, students viewed rape as a more serious and traumatic crime than robbery, and rapists were assigned longer prison sentences than were robbers. Although robbery victims were seen as more likely to have encouraged the crime than rape victims, they were not held more responsible for their victimization. In this study, the likelihood of encouragement variable was intended to measure the degree to which the victim was responsible for getting himself or herself into the situation, whereas the attribution of responsibility measure was intended to reflect the victim's responsibility for the outcome of the situation. The need for better means of clarifying and measuring attributions of responsibility has been previously suggested by several researchers (Kanekar, Kolsawalla, & D'Souza, 1981; Krulewitz & Nash, 1979), and continues to deserve future attention and refinement.

Although the effects of observer gender found in this study were fairly consistent with previous research findings (Calhoun, Selby, & Warring, 1976l; Deitz & Byrnes, 1981; Gilmartin-Zena, 1983; Rumsey & Rumsey, 1977), the lack of an interaction between victim gender and observer gender for attributions of responsibility suggests that students were not

more sympathetic toward same-gender victims as expected. This finding is, however, confounded by the fact that all of the assailants depicted in the vignettes were males.

Previous experimental research on the effects of the degree of acquaintance between female rape victims and their assailants on attributions of responsibility and definitions of rape has indicated that observers are less likely to define the sexual assault as rape and are more likely to view the victim as responsible for her victimizaiton when raped by an acquaintance (Klemmack & Klemmack, 1976; L'Armand & Pepitone, 1982). The present research addressed only assaults by strangers and further research should also examine the effects of degree of acquaintance on attributions of responsibility for various crimes committed against males versus females.

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Table 1

Comparison of Means by Victim Gender*

Dependent Variables	Male Victims	Female Victims
Victim Responsibility	1.96	2.71**
Victim Encouragement	2.17	2.86**
Identification with Victim	4.71	4.88
Feelings Toward Victim	5.75	5.69
Sentence Length	2.58	2.88***
Seriousness of Crime	5.63	5.65
Chance Selection of Victim	5.72	5.29
Trauma for Victim	5.14	5.40
Assailant Responsibility	6.35	6.34
Certainty of Guilt	6.04	6.02
Identification with Assailant	2.48	2.52
Feelings Toward Assailant	1.90	2.19

*All dependent variables were measured on 7-point semantic differential scales, with higher scores indicating greater levels of the variable.

**$p<.02$

***1=5 to 7 years, 2=8 to10 years, 3=11 to 13 years, 4=14 to 16 years, 5=17 to 19 years, 6=20 to 22 years, 7=23-25 years.

Table 2

Comparison of Means by Type of Crime

Dependent Variables	Robbery	Rape
Victim Responsibility	2.52	2.15
Victim Encouragement	3.04	1.98*
Identification with Victim	5.00	4.59
Feelings Toward Victim	5.52	5.92
Sentence Length	1.83	3.63*
Seriousness of Crime	4.98	6.29*
Chance Selection of Victim	5.31	5.71
Trauma for Victim	4.48	6.06*
Assailant's Responsibility	6.33	6.36
Certainty of Guilt	5.96	6.11
Identification with Assailant	2.69	2.31
Feelings Toward Assailant	2.38	1.71**

*p<.001

**p<.02

Table 3

Comparison of Means by Subject Gender

Dependent Variable	Male Subjects	Female Subjects
Victim Responsibility	2.50	2.17
Victim Encouragement	2.77	2.25
Identification with Victim	4.65	4.94
Feelings Toward Victim	5.80	5.65
Sentence Length	2.79	2.67
Seriousness of Crime	5.36	5.92*
Chance Selection of Victim	5.32	5.71
Trauma for Victim	5.08	5.46
Assailant Responsibility	6.02	6.67*
Certainty of Guilt	5.69	6.38*
Identification with Assailant	2.59	2.42
Feelings Toward Assailant	2.00	2.08

*p<.01